[fic] The Light Before We Land.

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Title: The Light Before We Land.
Fandom: Supernatural.
Rating: PG.
Warnings: Spoilers for the S6 finale! Otherwise none! (:O I can't believe it either.)
Pairings/Characters: Castiel/Gabriel.
Word Count: 2,436 words.
Summary: Castiel wants love and someone to trust, Gabriel's still good at hiding, and a million souls won't make Castiel happy but maybe ice cream will.

Note: Written for **morganoconner**'s birthday, which was last week. Happy belated birthday, dear!

This is the post!S6-finale fic I wanted to write and didn't quite get right the first time I tried. I hope you all enjoy it.

(But that was the problem with Gabriel, wasn't it? He never fell into line.)

Castiel is used to ghosts. He has caused too much death for an ignoble cause and has too much doubt to safely lay his own ghosts to rest, and now. Even more now he is used to ghosts, and used to ghosts that are not his own. Having the souls of countless numbers of humans within him - for all the strength it gives him, he must still shoulder the burdens of those souls, and sometimes he despairs of ever surviving that weight. For every soul that perished before it was satisfied, there is one that is pulling at him, pleading with him to help right their wrongs.

As their God, he should answer their prayers.

Yet in his identity as Castiel, he has the sight now to look beyond these ghosts, and the will.

Gabriel haunts him, and Castiel cannot fathom why. (Which is wrong, he knows himself, he knows every inch of himself as power is bright, too bright to hide from and he needed to burn out weaknesses within himself)

It doesn't matter where he is or what he's doing, Gabriel's always there, waving from a chair out of the corner of his eye or standing and watching, and Castiel cannot understand his expression, for the smile is always empty and when he does not smile -

Castiel wants love, and Gabriel (Gabriel's ghost) does not offer it to him.

Gabriel doesn't pray, either, not to him or to their former God, and that's wrong, Castiel knows it's wrong. Every ghost wants something, every soul within him *wants*.

But Gabriel doesn't. Castiel cannot help but stare back at him and want Gabriel to fall in line, to behave as he - as a ghost should.

But that was the problem with Gabriel, wasn't it? He never fell into line.

And Castiel can't help but notice that more and more Gabriel isn't even trying to smile.

The living cannot touch the dead.

Castiel knows this to be fact (unless he wills it otherwise) and as he will not change this for Gabriel's sake he instead looks away from Gabriel when he sees him.

This is why he is taken by surprise on the day Gabriel finally gets up from his chair and interrupts Castiel's work by putting his hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, bro," Gabriel says.

Castiel stares at him and thinks that he knows everything.

"You really must have had something on your mind if you could ignore me that long."

"How?" Castiel asks, then thinks and tries again. "I felt you die."

"Every angel felt me die," Gabriel says. "Even me. But the only one who felt me come back was, well, *me*."

Castiel can accept that, he has first-hand experience of angels coming back. He nods. The problem lies elsewhere: "I can't feel you. Why?"

Gabriel winks now, and there's something of the old humor in his expression now. "I was always good at hiding."

"The Winchesters found you." Castiel says tonelessly.

Gabriel makes a face. "The Winchesters do the impossible on a weekly basis. That, and I wanted to be found."

"I don't believe you."

"Okay, okay, fine, I'll admit it: I didn't expect the fire ring. That stuff is nearly impossible to get, and - "

"I was the one who gave it to them," Castiel says.

"The point is! I was going to tell them everything. It was something they needed to hear, like it or not, and I am the Messenger."

Castiel removes Gabriel's hand from his shoulder. It feels solid, real. Like Gabriel's alive, as is his vessel.

"Why can't I feel you now?" He asks.

Gabriel's studying him again, his face unreadable, before his lips curve into a smile and his hand sparks to life in Castiel's hold.

"Can you feel me now?" Gabriel asks, and it is the archangel, the bright messenger that Castiel sees before him, crowned in a halo bright enough to blind and countless wings spreading from his back and most importantly Castiel can *feel* the Grace shining brightly in him.

(*- so easy to snuff it out, like a candle, like Raphael's -*)

And then a curtain is drawn and Gabriel is lifeless, bland before him. Castiel couldn't find that Grace in Gabriel if he tried now, and Gabriel's hand is merely human.

"I felt you," Castiel says softly.

"Yup."

Castiel doesn't try to speak. What he would say would be "I want more" and he can't. He has to stop himself and pull away from his emotions and think.

He is God, and all angels are wired to love another creator, even when it hurts.

He can't make Gabriel love him, and he can't expect it from him. And that applies to all angels, which leaves him too few options.

"Leave and do not cross my path again, Gabriel, or serve me." He does not say the unspoken third option: defy me, and perish.

"Run, bow, or die, I get it." Gabriel waves a hand. "You're being too serious about this, Castiel, and far too narrow-minded."

"You can't see my thoughts."

"I can see your words," Gabriel says. "I know what you mean. And do you know how desperate you look right now? I bet you're just begging for me to get going so you don't have to do anything."

Castiel grits his teeth, then calms. He doesn't need to be angry.

"Can I fall between the extremes, please?" Gabriel asks. "I'll make a deal with you." He waits a moment, and Castiel says and betrays nothing, so he goes on. "Ice cream on weekends. We get together every seven days and have ice cream. I won't interfere with anything else you're doing unless we both agree I can. How's that sound?"

Castiel stares at Gabriel and can't figure him out.

"It's not what I want," Castiel says.

"Since when do we get what we want?"

"I'm God," Castiel says.

"That still doesn't mean you get what you want."

"I could make you - "

"I'm offering a chance where I could learn to love you without any coercion involved."

"Angels can't - "

"Two things wrong with that. One, I'm not strictly what I was, and two, angels can. The problem is, once we're in love it's so strong we can't help but keep loving until we're gone or the worst happens. And if the worst happens and we fall out of love, well, unless you have something else to love." Gabriel stops, and they're both thinking of Lucifer.

Gabriel looks into Castiel's eyes and Castiel looks back, aware that Gabriel's going to keep toeing the line and arousing his anger whenever they meet. He should stop this before it goes too far, but he can't raise his hand and try to rip away what is hiding Gabriel from him so he can snuff out the Grace underneath. He can't do that without reason, and Gabriel isn't giving him reason enough to do it.

Gabriel smiles and it's real this time, it reaches his eyes. He knows he's won this.

"Let me find you on a Thursday," Castiel says, and is gone.

Castiel has found that ever since ghosts began to cloud his vision that symbols have become more important to him. They stand out to him in a bold language he can read easily, and symbolism helps him cut to the matter at hand. The symbols that mean *him* - Thursday, for example - empower him. (It tempts him to form churches, to form religions, but he doesn't want mindless love, and he has enough power for his goals for now.)

It's why he said Thursday instead of Sunday, or Monday.

It calms him as he walks into an ice cream parlor where Gabriel is sitting at a booth near the back and it reassures him when Gabriel gives him a cheeky grin and slides a fudge sundae across to him.

"Gabriel," Castiel says, but Gabriel holds up a finger.

"A spoonful of the sundae and I'll listen to you all you want," Gabriel says.

Castiel doesn't like it, but he does try a bite.

He can say that he likes Gabriel's smile.

"Gabriel," Castiel begins again. "Why are you doing this?"

"Do I need a reason? It's you, Castiel. You're family, no matter how much you've changed."

Castiel looks across the table at Gabriel. "You weren't there when I needed you."

"I never said I was good family. I wasn't there when it counted for more brothers than you, Castiel. The point is, even though I'm not a good brother and you can't rely on me, I'm here now."

"That's an excuse."

"Yes." Gabriel puts a spoon in his bowl of ice cream. "But I'm still here, and I'm willing to talk to you about things I bet no one else will, out of fear or out of their own desires to make you happy."

Castiel's silent as Gabriel licks his spoon clean, not so much eating the ice cream as savoring it.

"There's lots of different kinds of love, you know," Gabriel says. "And as a God you crave it, because it's what ties you to a world that's too fragile for you now."

"How do you know?" Castiel asks.

"Take another bite and I'll tell you."

Castiel obliges, even if he doesn't have to. He could make Gabriel tell him. He tastes the too-sweet taste of ice cream instead.

"I was never on the level you're on now, but I was a god, Castiel."

"Pagan."

"Loki."

They stare at each other, then Gabriel has more ice cream.

"I was never loved for being Loki, not even among my fellow gods. Not in the way you want to be loved."

"You craved it," Castiel says.

"Of course I did. Pagan or not, god or not, at my heart I'm an angel and that flavors everything."

Castiel closes his eyes. He sees what Gabriel wants from him now.

Gabriel pauses, spoon in midair.

"I'm not an angel anymore."

"It colors your past and your past colors who you are now," Gabriel counters.

"What will it change, if I call myself an angel?" Castiel demands. Gabriel is leading him in circles. He should be able to see through them now but he can't.

"Family. Even if your family is the worst one out there, and there's arguments every time we sit down for dinner, we still love our brothers and sisters. Lucifer grieved for me, and he's the one who offed me. You were in trouble so you looked for Dad instead of some other god that - pagan or not - might have been able to help. It comes down to family, Castiel."

"...and if it does?"

"Admit you're family and I can love you. Not with the blind love of worship and the love that tastes wrong when you force it."

"Admit I'm family and you can use that against me."

"Admit you're family and I'll stick with you through thick and thin."

"You'll run," Castiel says, and stands up. He wants this over now. It won't work, it didn't with the Winchesters, or Balthazar, or any of them. "I can't trust you not to run and hide."

"I'll still love you," Gabriel says. "And wouldn't you feel better knowing that someone out there loves you for who you are, regardless of any flaws and mistakes you make?"

Castiel stares at him for a long moment.

"No."

Castiel turns away from the table and is gone.

Gabriel spends the next Thursday in the same ice cream parlor sipping milkshakes, but Castiel doesn't come.

The Thursday after that is the same, but Gabriel stares into the dregs of his sundae and foresees a bright future for his brother, once he opens up enough to try it.

Not that a nudge wouldn't be appreciated, he thinks, so he snaps a 'Wish you were here!' postcard into the pockets of Castiel's eternal trenchcoat.

The Thursday after *that*, Gabriel is beginning to think that while he might never see Castiel again, this is a great excuse for having ice cream all day.

The Thursday Gabriel starts stacking cherries on his sundae to make impossible towers, Castiel shows up.

Gabriel looks up from his cherries and smiles at him.

"Yes," Castiel says.

"'bout time," Gabriel says, and gets out of the booth to give Castiel a hug. He doesn't push it for long, and lets go, pulling Castiel back to the booth. "I've found the best flavor in the joint and I want to share it with you."

Gabriel knows that Castiel's indulging him when he lets him spoon-feed him ice cream, and he doesn't want to venture too far into Castiel's head to understand what's going on in his noggin, but there's a smile ghosting about Castiel's lips.

"Same time next week?" Gabriel asks when they're done.

"Yes," Castiel says, and Gabriel reaches to ruffle Castiel's hair. "Why aren't you asking why I came back?"

Gabriel pauses mid-ruffle. "Why look a gift-horse in the mouth? You're letting yourself have a little happiness, and I'm glad you trust me enough to share that happiness with me. I don't need to know why unless you want to tell me. Do you?"

Castiel tilts his head, then touches Gabriel's hand, lightly removing it from his head. "Are you lonely?"

Gabriel winces. Straight to a point he doesn't want to touch on, and he can't dance around it with Castiel. "Are you going to shun me if I am?"

"Only if it's your only reason for seeing me."

"It's not." Gabriel says. "You may not believe me, but I genuinely one hundred percent care about you."

Castiel doesn't know what to say to that, Gabriel can see it all over his face.

So Gabriel moves in and hugs Castiel again.

It's still loose and awkward, but he holds on and Castiel comes around and puts his hands on Gabriel's back.

"You're really confused by me right now," Gabriel says. "I don't need to look at you to know that. So let me make it simple: same time next week? I'll be here."

Gabriel doesn't need to look at Castiel when he can feel Castiel's hold on him tightening, and he can hear the whispered 'yes' in his ear. He doesn't need to react, he knows Castiel would probably like it if he didn't.

He'd pretend he doesn't hear Castiel say 'thank you' for both their sakes, but Gabriel's terrible at giving up the last words to someone else.

"You're welcome," he whispers back, and, "Love you, Castiel."